

TOP SECRET

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(SOVIET BOMBER)

WASHINGTON (UPI) -- HIGH PERFORMANCE SOVIET BACKFIRE BOMBERS ARE CONDUCTING LONG DISTANCE MARITIME RECONNAISSANCE FLIGHTS OVER U.S. INSTALLATIONS IN THE AZORES, AVIATION WEEK AND SPACE TECHNOLOGY REPORTED MONDAY.

BACKFIRE IS THE NATO NAME FOR THE LATEST SOVIET TWINJET, VARIABLE-WING BOMBER WHICH HAS BEEN A POINT OF CONTROVERSY IN STRATEGIC ARMS LIMITATION TALKS WITH THE UNITED STATES.

"SOVIET TUPOLEV BACKFIRE STRATEGIC BOMBERS, USING AIR-TO-AIR REFUELING, ARE CONDUCTING MARITIME RECONNAISSANCE FLIGHTS, INCLUDING SOME OVER U.S. INSTALLATIONS IN THE AZORES, FROM BASES NEAR MURMANSK," AVIATION WEEK SAID.

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John McMahon - is there any community action we can take on this. Looks to me like an original

Comment:

TU-95s have flown over the Azores, but never a Backfire. In fact, they have never been observed anywhere over the Atlantic.

DOD helpful lead - Should we notify community - this not confirmable (over)

These comments represent the initial and tentative reaction of the CIA Operations Center and of the appropriate analytic component in the Agency

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"THE LONG-RANGE OPERATION IS BUTTRESSING THE POSITION HELD BY U.S. SALT NEGOTIATORS THAT THE AIRCRAFT SHOULD BE COUNTED AS PART OF THE 2,400 STRATEGIC DELIVERY SYSTEMS PERMITTED THE SOVIETS BY THE VLADIVOSTOK ARMS LIMITATION AGREEMENT," IT SAID.

U.S. OFFICIALS MAINTAIN BACKFIRE IS A STRATEGIC BOMBER CLOSE TO THE B1 IN PERFORMANCE, AND THAT THE VLADIVOSTOK ACCORD CLEARLY IMPLIED IT WOULD BE COUNTED IN THE TOTAL CEILING SET FOR STRATEGIC VEHICLES.

THE SOVIETS MAINTAIN THE BACKFIRE SHOULD NOT BE COUNTED AT ALL. AVIATION WEEK SAID SECRETARY OF STATE HENRY KISSINGER, "WHO DEALS DIRECTLY WITH SENIOR SOVIET OFFICIALS OFTEN CIRCUMVENTING SALT NEGOTIATIONS, HAS BEEN WILLING TO PERMIT THE SOVIETS TO DEPLOY A NUMBER OF THE BOMBERS ABOVE THE LIMIT WITHOUT COUNTING THEM."

BACKFIRE, ACCORDING TO THE ROYAL AIR FORCE'S CHIEF OF STAFF, "MAY SOON BECOME AN EVEN GREATER DANGER TO ALLIED SHIPPING THAN THE RELATIVELY SLOW-MOVING RUSSIAN SUBMARINES."

THE AIRCRAFT HAS A NON-REFUELED COMBAT RADIUS OF ABOUT 3,570 MILES AND WITH IN-FLIGHT REFUELING COULD HAVE INTERCONTINENTAL CAPABILITIES.

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